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# THE SIEGE IN PEKING : ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES.

AN ADDRESS BY

DR. W. A. P. MARTIN.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY :

You have asked me to give you some account of the siege in Peking, together with the causes that led up to it, and its probable outcome. No proper view of the thrilling events which have there taken place can be given without first touching upon the *geographical situation*. Man is moulded by his environment, and it would not be difficult to show how the character of the Chinese—physical, moral, and intellectual—has been formed by the geography of their country. Of England a well-known poet, after satirizing the villainous climate of his country, exclaims :

“Tis thus, with rigor for his good designed,  
She rears her favorite man of all mankind.”

A Chinese philosopher would unquestionably adopt without objection every word of the English poet, and he would lay special emphasis on the phrase, “Her favorite man of all mankind.” He reads in the ancient books of his own country a tradition that man was made, not of dust but clay, the clay being of different colors. The Chinese were made first, and of yellow clay, hence they gave themselves the flattering designation of “Men of Gold.” That title we find to have been a common one amongst the Tartars of the north. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries a large part of northern China was subject to a body of Tartars, who bore the tribal name of “Golden Horde.” The present rulers of China, called Manchus, claim them for their remote ancestors, and continue to wear the same title of “Golden Horde”—in the Manchu language “*Aischin Gioro*.” Having referred to the Tartars, I would like to have you observe that their relations to the Chinese from time immemorial have been very similar to those of the Shepherd Kings to the rich inhabitants of the Nile Valley. The Chinese depended upon agriculture, while the wandering nomads of the northern plains subsisted on their flocks and herds without settled homes. They were always ready to make incursions into the bordering provinces of China, and oftentimes succeeded in effecting the conquest of a portion, or the whole, of the Chinese Empire. It is

startling to discover that one or other of these northern tribes, Mongol or Manchu, has exercised the mastery over China for seven hundred out of the last fifteen hundred years; nor are the troubles caused by them limited to seven centuries, for the Great Wall, so huge as to form a geographical feature on the surface of the globe, attests a perennial conflict between Tartar and Chinese, for it was erected two hundred and forty years before the Christian era for the express purpose of keeping the Tartars out. That such a conflict should exist from generation to generation is no matter of surprise. Schiller tells us that it began not far from the Garden of Eden, and has been handed down from Cain and Abel to the present time. His version of the Bible story is that Abel's sheep trespassed on the cornfields of his brother Cain.

A Chinese historian says of the Great Wall: "It required so much labor for its construction that it was the ruin of one generation, but it was the salvation of all that followed." To me this appears to be an over-estimate of its benefits; for while it has undoubtedly served the purpose of a barrier against small bodies of marauders, it has never sufficed to restrain great armies like those of Genghis Khan. The Manchus, who for two hundred and fifty-six years have held the throne in Peking, were not under the necessity of forcing their way across this international barrier, but had its gates thrown wide open for them by a Chinese General, Wu San Kwei. He invited their assistance to suppress a body of rebels who had got possession of the Capital, and to take revenge for the crimes committed by them—an errand very similar to that of the eight Powers now in occupation of China. The rebels were easily put to flight, but when the General offered to pay off his Tartar allies and invited them to retire to the north of the Great Wall they respectfully declined to do so. An old fable tells us that an ass, in danger of being driven from his pasture grounds by a horned stag, invited a primitive man to mount on his back and drive away his enemy. When the stag was put to flight, he asked the man to dismount; but he was an ass to imagine that the man would comply with his wishes. China finds herself in the same predicament to-day. Instead of the Manchu Tartars, ranged curiously enough under eight banners, she finds herself completely under the power of the eight mightiest nations of the globe. They are in the saddle, with their bit in the ass's mouth, and though that noble beast, like that of the ancient prophet, speaks with human voice, and utters an energetic protest, it remains to be seen whether some of these eight nations will not persist in keeping their place in the saddle.

The fact that China is, and has been, under foreign domination for two centuries and a half is essential to the comprehension of that astounding movement which has so engrossed the attention of the world. The cooping up of eleven Legations in the capital of China, together with a war of extermination on all foreigners, and foreign interests of every description, whether mercantile or missionary, calls for explanation. What motives, we are asked, could prove themselves so potent in their effect on all classes in that Empire as to bring about combined action of high and low for the expulsion of foreigners? I answer that there are three motives which, taken in connection with the circumstances of the age, appear to me to be sufficient to account for the phenomenon. They are, first, political jealousy; second, religious antipathy, and last, but not least, industrial competition. These have operated in different proportions on different classes, while in some instances all three have combined to produce their effect on the mind of one class. The existence of political jealousy is inseparable from a foreign domination.

The Manchu dynasty, though it has produced many able rulers, has never been free from the influence of that kind of jealousy. The Manchus have always feared, since the dawn of commercial intercourse with the great nations of the West, that some of those nations would endeavor to supplant them in the occupation of China. They have accordingly been suspicious of everything, whether commerce, missionary enterprise, or railways and mines, which tended to increase the prestige of foreigners. Some of these undertakings they have looked upon as a pre-emption claim on their territory; others as a settled scheme for winning away the hearts of their people. You will naturally infer that they have never shown themselves, with one exception, which I shall presently mention, very solicitous for the intellectual enlightenment of their Chinese subjects. The old philosopher, Laotse, lays down as a maxim for easy government—in satire, no doubt—that it is only necessary to fill the people's bellies and to empty their skulls. On this the present rulers of China—I mean the Empress Dowager and her clique—are acting in the suppression of schools, the interdiction of newspapers, and the attempted extirpation of Christian Missions. The exception referred to is a remarkable one. It is the young Emperor, Kwang Su, who is in no degree responsible for hostilities with foreign Powers, but is rather to be regarded as the first victim on a long and sanguinary list. Nephew of the Empress Dowager, he was adopted by her at the age of three. With a view

to preparing him for his great destiny, he was provided with numerous instructors, two of whom were my own students. Their duty was to induct His Majesty into a knowledge of the English language, and in order to be sure that the lessons which they set for him were correct, they always submitted them to me for approval. I shall not affirm, therefore, that I am entirely innocent of having exerted some influence to bias the mind of the young Emperor.

It is impossible that he should have studied English without becoming infected with progressive ideas. Still, the blame, or the honor, of having perverted the mind of the "illustrious successor" (as his name signifies) belongs to Kang Yu Wei more than to any one else. This patriotic scholar perceived the necessity of reforming the educational system of China in order to secure the permanent independence of his country. He got the ear of the Emperor, and of that young man it is no little praise to say that he possessed the intellectual capacity to comprehend the ideas of the bold reformer and the strength of will to resolve on carrying them into effect. He issued decree after decree, with startling rapidity, setting aside the effete system of essays and sonnets in civil service examinations in favor of the sciences and practical arts of the modern world. In order to prepare students for these new tests, a system of common schools was to be established, Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian temples being placed at their disposal. Middle schools were to be established in all the districts, and colleges in the several provinces, with a new University in the capital for the graduates of provincial institutions and for the sons of the nobility. Nor did His Majesty stop with educational reform. He diligently sought to prune away the dead branches of the tree in order to increase the quantity and improve the quality of its fruit. Sinecures in the Mandarinate were abolished, and new bureaux established, such as those for commerce, mining, and agriculture. More than all, he resolved to confer on his people the priceless boon of free speech, ordaining that even junior officials should have the privilege of addressing the Throne without let or hindrance. This was the rock on which his noble scheme of reform was shattered. A young man, a doctor in the Han Lin, who was well known to me, though a junior member in the Board of Rites, drew up a memorial proposing numerous changes in the administration of the Government. His chiefs, all old men, and mostly Tartars, refused to transmit the document to the Throne. The Emperor, on learning that they had dared to intervene between him and his officials, flew into a towering rage, stripped them of their official honors, and threatened to dismiss

them from the public service. Those old men, smarting under the disgrace, posted away to the Country Palace, and threw themselves at the feet of the Empress Dowager, begging her to come out of her retirement and save the Empire from the hands of a young man who was driving the chariot of State so furiously that there was danger of his setting the world on fire. She had been Regent twice before, but she had never retired altogether from the world of politics. With her neither card parties, nor novels, nor theatrical shows, could compete in interest with the political chess-board; in all moves on that board her fingers had been more or less concerned. Eagerly did she embrace the invitation, and as with a bolt out of the blue she struck down the impetuous youth, compelling him to sign a paper begging her to teach him how to govern. By way of justifying her action, she issued an edict, in which, amongst other things, she said that her subjects must not suppose that she was opposed to rational progress. It does not follow, she said, that we should stop eating because we have been choked. She meant to say that her adopted son had crammed his reforms down the throats of his people too fast for their digestion. She intended to administer them with judicious moderation, in such quantity and degree as would make them easier of assimilation. Well had it been for her and her dynasty had she adhered to this principle; on the contrary, throwing herself into the hands of a reactionary party, instead of progress she entered upon an anti-foreign reaction, in which a disastrous smash-up became inevitable. She began by cancelling all the educational and other administrative reforms inaugurated by the young Emperor.

The only one of the institutions established by him which she permitted to remain was the new University. That institution she no doubt spared because it had been favored or, as one might say, founded by Li Hung Chang, who, by the way, though he still continues to be her faithful servant, has behind him a record of imperishable glory as the foremost patron of the new education in the Chinese Empire. It was he who recommended me for the Presidency of the University, which I may describe as at present in a state of suspended animation, the Russians having seized on the buildings for soldiers' barracks and threatened to confiscate its funds, which were deposited in Russian banks.

A little before the *coup d'état* Germany had seized a seaport by way of reprisal for the murder of two of her missionaries in the south of Shantung. Russia demanded the cession of Port Arthur as an offset. England insisted on having Wei Hai Wei, on the

opposite side of the Gulf, in order to keep watch on the movements of her northern rival. France, in the far south, protested against being left out in the cold, for was she not as great a Power as any of them? She demanded that the equilibrium of the political balance should be maintained by giving her the Bay of Kwang Chau, not far from the borders of her Anamite Empire. The Empress, who by this time had become Regent for the third time, was irritated beyond endurance, and while she feigned to yield to these demands rather than to make war without due preparation, she made it known to her people that if any other nation should come forward with similar demands she would declare war. In the meantime she made extensive purchases of war material, and sought by every means to propagate anti-foreign feeling among her people, as the best safeguard against foreign aggression.

Never had the anti-foreign feeling been at so low an ebb as during the short reign of the young Emperor. An awakening had shown itself among the Chinese people, which might be described as a shaking among the dry bones. Newspapers in the Chinese language had increased in two or three years from seventeen to seventy-six. The publications of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and Useful Knowledge, consisting, not of "Christian Science," but Science Christianized, increased within the same time from \$800 to \$18,000. The whole people were penetrated with a desire for progress, and though they had been recently beaten in war by the Japanese, they proposed to imitate their victorious enemies and learn the best lessons of the West as the surest way of rehabilitation. When the Marquis Ito visited China, a little more than two years ago, I complimented him on the influence which his country was exerting on China in consequence of being her nearest neighbor. I compared it to the tide, raised by the moon, as our nearest neighbor in the solar system; but I took care not to hint that his country, like the moon, was shining by borrowed light. Yet it is true that the reforms which China and her young Emperor so much admired were borrowed at second hand from these United States.

Immediately on the occupation of Kiao Chau, the Germans proceeded to lay out railways in different directions across the province of Shantung, which they claimed as their sphere of influence, and which some of their newspapers, by way of anticipation, described as "German China." The natives were aroused much more by these enterprises than by any abstract question of infringement of territorial rights. To them it appeared horrible that the

spirits of their ancestors should be waked by the snorting of the iron horse, and that cemeteries should be desecrated by the passage of the iron road. They everywhere set upon the engineers and impeded the prosecution of their work. The most active in leading this opposition were the members of a secret society called "Boxers."

That society is not a new one called into existence, as has been supposed, by the work of missions; on the contrary, it gave trouble more than a century ago to the Chinese Government, and in 1803 was formally placed upon the Index of forbidden associations. Since then it has languished in obscurity until recent events called it into life and until the favor shown it by the Empress Dowager transformed it into a great political party. The doctrine to which it owes its existence is not orthodox Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism, but a superstition based on hypnotism, mesmerism, or spiritualism, as it is variously called. Among its members are many whose nervous condition fits them for spiritualistic mediums, and through these the Society gets oracles from the unseen world. They undergo a species of drill, which is intended to enable each member at will to go into the trance state. When in that condition they profess to be endowed with supernatural strength and rendered bullet-proof. These mysteries, so piquant to the curious at all times, were particularly attractive in view of possible hostilities with foreign nations. The organization spread like wildfire among the people of Shantung, and the Manchu Governor, Yuhien, finding in these people an auxiliary force, supplied them with arms.

The Empress Dowager, and Prince Tuan, father of the heir-apparent, encouraged them to come to the capital. In their devastating march they killed missionaries and laid waste Christian villages, nor did they abstain from many a village which was not Christian, but which excited their cupidity by the spoils which it offered. Reaching the vicinity of the capital, they tore up the railways leading to the west, and burned down the stations near the city. Then it was, not till then, that the Ministers in the capital awoke to the seriousness of the situation. Missionaries had been uttering their Cassandra warnings, but the Ministers always turned for information to the Tsung Li Yamen, the official organ or Foreign Office of the Chinese Government. They were there told that these Boxers practised an innocent kind of gymnastics, and if they did sometimes show themselves turbulent and disposed to quarrel with native Christians it was not without cause. But the Empress Dowager intended shortly to issue a



decree dismissing them to their homes. Such decrees were issued, accompanied by secret instructions not to regard them.

The meaning of the destruction of the railway was not to be misunderstood; the Ministers, without waiting for the consent of the Chinese Government, ordered a guard of marines to be sent up from the sea coast, and they arrived not a day too soon. The next day the railway to the east was also broken up, and had their arrival been delayed forty-eight hours no foreigner in Peking would have lived to tell the tale. There were only three hundred and fifty, all told, but their mere presence for a time held our enemies in check, and they served eventually to make good the defence of the Legations. On the 11th of June, a fortnight after their arrival, an attaché of the Japanese Legation was killed at the railway station by Boxers and Chinese soldiers combined. This may be regarded as introducing the first stage of the siege. For the next nine days the Boxers were specially prominent, setting fire not only to churches and mission houses, but burning up all the native storehouses which they suspected of containing foreign goods. Square miles of ground were left by them covered with the ruins of the richest business houses in Peking. On the 19th of June, a circular from the Foreign Office informed the Foreign Ministers that the Admirals had demanded the surrender of the forts at the mouth of the river. This, said they, is an act of war. You must now quit the capital with all your people within four-and-twenty hours. The Ministers agreed to protest against the severity of this condition. The first to set out for the Foreign Office with this purpose in view was Baron Ketteler, the German Minister. No sooner had he reached the great street than he was shot in the back by a man wearing the official costume of the Chinese Government, and fell dead. His interpreter was wounded, but succeeded in making his escape and giving the alarm.

The other Ministers believed that a general massacre had begun, and with their people, who had already taken refuge under their several flags, they fled precipitately to the British Legation, which, having been the residence of a high Prince, covered a large space of ground, and was surrounded by strong walls, forming a citadel capable of defence. It had accordingly been agreed upon as a place to make a stand in the last resort, and Sir Claude McDonald not only generously welcomed his colleagues but received all their people, whether civilian or missionary. The missionaries were accompanied by their converts, Catholic and Protestant, to the number of near two thousand. For the converts an asylum was

secured in the grounds of a Mongol prince on the opposite side of a canal from the British Legation. Professor James, the man chiefly instrumental in securing it, was himself slain by the enemy in the afternoon of the same day. Had the enemy followed up their advantage, they might, perhaps, in the midst of our first confusion, have overwhelmed all the Legations; but they feared to come to close quarters. Some of the outlying Legations were destroyed by fire, but most of them were included within our line of defence. None of them, however, except the Legation of Great Britain, was considered safe for the residence of a diplomatic family.

Within the gates of the British Legation, which covered six or seven acres of ground and contained twenty or thirty different buildings, were congregated nearly one thousand foreigners, and from this time for eight weeks we were closely besieged, not by Boxers, but by the soldiers of the Chinese Government. That very evening, at nightfall, they opened a terrible fusillade, and this was renewed day after day, chiefly under cover of night, so that we came to speak of it rather contemptuously as a "serenade." It was not, however, altogether ineffective, for day by day some of our men were killed or wounded, and in the sorties, which were occasionally made to drive our assailants back or to silence their batteries, the casualties were always serious. What we most dreaded was the firebrand, and when the ruthless enemy, with more than vandal ferocity, set fire to the library of the Imperial Academy, for the purpose of burning us out, we all had to assist in fighting the flames. Women and children, including the wives of Ministers, passed buckets from hand to hand. A change of wind came to our aid and the Legation was saved. At first the enemy assailed us only with fire and small arms; gradually, however, they got guns of considerable calibre in position and at all hours of the day attacked us with shell and round shot. Mrs. Conger, wife of the Minister, in whose family I was kindly received as a guest, had embraced the ideal philosophy of Bishop Berkeley, and looked on all this pyrotechny as a play of the imagination. I envied her the comforting delusion, for when I went out and picked up a six-pound round shot I found it too heavy and solid to be resolved into a fancy. Whether owing to her philosophy or to her Christian-faith she is one of the most admirable women I ever knew; calm and unperturbed in the midst of danger, she realized the description which Pope gave two hundred years ago of his ideal woman, as "Mistress of herself though China fall."

Mr. Conger, an old soldier, who fought through all the years of our Civil War, and marched with Sherman from Atlanta to the Sea, met the trials and exigencies of this occasion with becoming fortitude and cool judgment. Diplomatist as well as soldier, he knows how to deal with the most serious questions that confront him as negotiator in this Chinese problem. His daughter, Miss Conger, had visited many water-cures in quest of health. The fire cure, to which she was now exposed, proved to be the required remedy. On the first fire she threw herself weeping into her father's arms; the next day she listened to it calmly, and then from day to day she seemed to acquire new strength, until she came out of the siege restored to perfect health. If I be asked how we spent our time, I answer—there was no frivolity and no idleness. Every man had his post of duty; mine was to serve as Inspector of Passes at the Legation gate for Chinese going back and forth between the Legations within our lines. There it was my sad lot to see many fine young men go out full of life and hope to come in wounded, maimed, and dying. We lost in all, killed and wounded, more than a third of our number. If we were asked what we lived on, I answer—the coarsest of bread and the poorest of meat. The meat was that of horses, varied by an occasional mule; even that was so reduced in quantity that only three ounces per diem were allowed for each individual. Milk was a luxury, even condensed milk beyond our reach, and no fewer than six or seven infant children perished for want of it. While the men fought or mounted guard the women made sand-bags from day to day to the number of many thousands for the strengthening of our fortifications, and by their calm demeanor and hopeful words they strengthened the arms of their brave defenders. On one occasion it was deemed necessary to make a desperate effort to regain possession of a portion of the city wall which dominated these Legations. A company of some sixty men—American, British and Russian—was formed under the lead of Capt. Myers of the U. S. Marines. When ready to make the attack, and hoping to take the enemy by surprise, he made a short speech: “My men,” said he, “within yonder Legation there are three hundred women and children whose lives depend upon our success; if we fail they perish and we perish with them; so when I say ‘GO,’ then go.” The Americans and English were thrilled by his words, and the Russians understood his gestures. All felt that it was a forlorn hope, and all were ready to lay down their lives to insure success.

The movement proved successful, and that portion of the wall

remained in the possession of our men until our rescuers entered by the water-gate beneath it.

When the siege began we expected relief in a few days; but when Seymour's column was driven back we tried to wait with patience for the coming of the grand army under the eight banners. Yet so closely were we shut up that we had almost no information as to its movements, and our souls were sickened by hope deferred. At length, when our rations had run almost to the lowest ebb, when we had horse meat for only two days more, and bread for no more than a fortnight, so that starvation actually stared us in the face, one night, on the 14th of August, a sentry rushed into Mr. Conger's room, where I also was trying to sleep, and cried out: "They are coming. They are coming. The army of relief. I hear their guns!" The Minister and I were soon in the open air; we did not wait to put on our clothes, for we had never taken them off. We heard the machine guns playing on the outer wall; and never did music sound so sweet. It was like the bagpipes of Havelock's Highlanders to the ears of the besieged at Lucknow. The ladies were wakened, and soon men and women poured out from all the buildings and listened with irrepressible excitement to the music of the guns. Women threw themselves on each other's necks and wept, while men grasped hands with feelings too deep for utterance.

The next morning the great gates of the Legation were thrown open, and in rode a company of Indian cavalry. They were, I thought—and I have no doubt every one of our besieged garrison thought the same—the finest men I had ever looked upon.

The siege was ended. The rest of the army entered by the great front gate of the city, the key of which had been captured from the flying enemy by Captain Squires, of our Legation, who is one of the heroes of the siege. The next day we all joined in singing a *Te Deum* in the tennis court of the Legation, and Dr. Smith in a short address pointed out ten circumstances in each of which the finger of God was visible in our deliverance. He might have extended them a hundred. After thanking God, it only remains to thank our noble President for having despatched the army and navy to our succor without waiting to call an extra session of Congress. I feel proud of my country for the record she has established on this occasion—not only taking her place among the great Powers, who have interests as wide as the world, but showing that her arms are long enough to protect and rescue her people in all parts of the globe.

The curtain has not yet fallen on the last scene of this tremen-

dous drama. The Empress and her court fled the city, almost at the moment when our troops entered it, and she has taken refuge at an old capital in one of the northwestern provinces. Whether the government will be re-established at Peking is highly problematical. For my own part I think the restoration of the young Emperor, who might carry out his progressive measures under the supervision of the Great Powers, offers the best solution. The integrity of the Empire would then be maintained, and possible conflicts between European claimants averted.

China must, of course, pay a heavy war indemnity. It is understood that not only the foreign nations, but individual foreigners, will be indemnified. But no assurance is given that any compensation will be made to native Christians whose houses have been burned and whose relations have been slaughtered. Diplomats and military men have joined in acknowledging that but for the bone and muscle supplied by those native Christians the defence of the Legations would have been impossible. Though they performed the humble office of navvies in building barricades, digging trenches, and countermining against the enemy, their services were indispensable to the common safety.

“ Heaven framing, each on other to depend,  
Bade each on other for assistance call,  
Till one man's weakness grows the strength of all.”

I cannot believe that any Christian country will consent to the gross injustice which is involved in excluding them from the provisions of the indemnity clause.

The greatest enemy to the orderly and profitable intercourse of nations is heathen darkness. Of Pagan superstition we may say:

Unglaube du bist nicht so viel ein Ungeheuer,  
Als Aberglaube du !

No restriction, therefore, should in any way be placed on the operations of missionary bodies who seek to dispel that darkness and to diffuse the light of science as well as religion. Without these our railway and mining enterprises will be insecure, and we can have no assurance that that monster, the dragon, who has now been cast down before the Soldiers of the Cross, will not again raise his head and bring about another catastrophe similar to that which has so lately horrified the world.